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SUBJECT: CROSSED WIRES: NPR'S REPORT ON OUTSOURCING AIRLINE REPAIRS

REF: 08 SAN SALVADOR 324

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Officials from the El Salvador-based Aeroman repair facility strongly refuted allegations raised in a recent National Public Radio report concerning the potential safety implications of the growing practice in the airline industry of outsourcing maintenance abroad. Aeroman clients including Southwest and TACA stand by the repair facility, expressing confidence in the quality of the repair work and their respective quality control and inspection regimes. A 2008 CODEL also left favorably impressed with Aeroman. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) NPR recently broadcast a three-part series entitled, "Crossed Wires: Flaws in Airline Repairs Abroad", featuring an investigative report on Aeroman, an airline maintenance company based in El Salvador and owned by the Canadian company ACTS (80 percent) and Grupo TACA (20 percent). In the NPR story, Aeroman was heavily criticized for paying low wages, rushing repair work, forcing employees to work long hours, and hiring employees incapable of reading English repair manuals. The investigative report identified mistakes made by Aeroman mechanics, including crossed wires in a cockpit fuel indicator and improperly placed seals on an exit door.

13. (SBU) Andres Garcia, Aeroman's Commercial Director, and Arturo Torres, Aeroman's Quality Assurance Manager, confirmed that the errors identified in the NPR story did occur, but they added such mistakes are very rare. Torres said Aeroman and its clients conduct rigorous quality assurance inspections to ensure that mistakes, like those cited in the NPR story, are caught before aircraft are put back into service.

14. (SBU) Torres refuted NPR's other claims, stating that Aeroman pays a generous wage for local standards, only hires technicians after they have passed a technical English exam, and that employee hours are strictly regulated by FAA standards. Garcia emphasized that Aeroman has never been responsible for a mechanical failure that led to a crash. They speculated that the NPR story was driven by airline mechanic unions in the U.S. worried about losing more jobs overseas.

15. (SBU) Garcia said Aeroman falls under constant scrutiny since they are located in a "developing country" and because of the perception that El Salvador lacks labor with the technical skills to perform complicated airline maintenance work. Garcia explained that Aeroman is the only Airbus Maintenance Repair and Overhaul (MRO) network repair facility in Latin America, and they are also certified by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) and seven other governments. According to Les Dorr, the FAA Spokesman for the Western Hemisphere Office, the FAA assessed penalties against Aeroman for the problem with the misplaced door seals that was cited in the NPR story, but that is the only such incident that they consider a problem. Dorr said FAA conducts thorough audits of Aeroman and they believe Aeroman performs high quality work.

16. (SBU) Three U.S. carriers use Aeroman for heavy maintenance: U.S. Airways, Jet Blue and Southwest Airlines. Heidi Frederick, Manager

of International Safety and Security Operations for Southwest Airlines, told Econoff that Aeroman has serviced three Southwest aircraft since early 2009, and Southwest is extremely satisfied with the quality of maintenance. Arturo Saravia, Grupo TACA's Maintenance Planning Manager, likewise said TACA is extremely satisfied with the quality of service provided by Aeroman. Saravia said TACA technical representatives are on hand at the facility and perform checks throughout the repair process to ensure accuracy of the repairs performed by Aeroman.

17. (SBU) A House Transportation Committee CODEL visited Aeroman in February 2008, as part of an inspection of overseas maintenance facilities. The delegation left favorably impressed with Aeroman, praising its controls and noting that it was better than some US facilities they had seen (reftel).

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